



# State of Connecticut COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Central Office ~ 25 Sigourney Street, Hartford, CT 06106

*Promoting Equality and Justice for all People*

## Planning and Development Committee - March 6, 2015 SB 831, An Act Eliminating the Municipal Exemption from the Contract Compliance Requirements in State Contracts

Senator Osten, Representative Miller, Senator Linares, Representative Aman and member of the Planning and Development Committee I am Cheryl Sharp deputy director of CHRO. I am here today to speak in **STRONG SUPPORT** of SB 831 which will help to overcome one of the most serious challenges women and minority owned businesses face in doing business with the State of Connecticut – bonding.

SB 831 would remove language from respective contracting and contract compliance statutes which currently exempt municipalities from nondiscrimination requirements in contracts that are state financed.

Through the removal of the exemption language, SB 831 would attach nondiscrimination requirements to the many millions of state dollars that fund municipal projects, purchases and grant programs each year. This bill is needed to address inequalities in contracting opportunities, which would in turn provide a boost for small businesses and minority businesses in Connecticut.

While a few large municipalities like the City of New Haven have a very active and vigilant contract compliance program, efforts like those of New Haven are rare or virtually nonexistent elsewhere. The CHRO is regularly made aware of this by minority contractors who have repeatedly watched municipal contracts begin and end, but are shut out of these construction opportunities. These minority contractors over many years have asked why the CHRO is not enforcing the law on municipal construction projects that are funded by the state. Our answer is always the same: current state law does not apply to municipalities.

Since municipalities are not required to include the state's nondiscrimination language in the contracts funded with state dollars, there is no obligation for the municipal contractors to assure that the contract is performed without unlawful discrimination. There is no contractor obligation to employ small businesses and minority contractors or to ensure that subcontractors commit to nondiscrimination. Although the state dollars and financial assistance have aided a municipality, the state funds have had no impact on reducing discrimination and improving business opportunities for small businesses and minority businesses. As a condition of receiving state dollars, municipalities should adhere to the same requirements that apply to the state. State contracting requirements should follow state money.

SB 831 presents an invaluable opportunity to make sure that municipal contractors take steps not to discriminate in the performance of state-funded contracts. From our experience in monitoring state contracts, the CHRO has seen that helping small contractors, minority business enterprises, and businesses owned by individuals with disabilities promotes economic opportunities across the state and reduces discrimination.

